

The Sun.

BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD

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VALE.

By Weare Holbrook.

A THING that's given once away
Cannot be given again,
And roses in the month of May
Have tumbled wildly where to-day
A naked bush stands snarling, gray,
And whipped by autumn rain.

A while, and Spring will come, you say,
As pleasure after pain.
The homely hills will soon be gay
When moths among the windflowers play
And men and maidens once more stray
Besides the feathered grain.

But creatures that you sometimes slay
Will lie forever slain,
And mine are feet that cannot stay
While fiddlers stop to ask for pay,
So speed me, love, upon my way!
I shall not come again.

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A LIST OF "MY BEST BOOKS."

UNDER heaven and short of omniscience there is no such thing as selecting the best recent books. It never has been attempted by *Books and the Book World*, and it never will be. Personal opinions are another matter, and in this number we present an assortment of such opinions which we at least have found interesting and stimulating.

Of three lists presented heretofore, one was made up of the choices of authors, one of those of our own staff book reporters, the third of publishers' ideas concerning their wares. None of the three purported to cover the field and point out everything good, and with all three the selections were explained by the people who made them.

This fourth has been obtained by cutting up *Who's Who in America* and the similar British volume, mixing the names of the Whos in a hat, blindfold drawing twenty or thirty, and addressing to each Whom a request to say what book or books had most interested Whom during the last twelve-month. Not all the recipients complied. The first name out of the hat was WOODROW WILSON, who proved, when looked up, to be President of the United States. A Mr. TUMULTY wrote us that the request would be laid before him at the earliest opportunity. Too late, too late, he cannot enter now—yet may we not conjecture that the book which has interested the President most is the same that was laid before BROCKDORFF-RANTZAU at Versailles—and that this is also true of BROCKDORFF-RANTZAU? (Not to mention Senator LODGE!)

Getting down to the returns and leaving idle speculations: the book interests of several contributors to our symposium will be found to run true to form. The most celebrated living *Carmen* names the greatest of bull-fighting novels. (We liked *Blood and Sand* ourselves, admired it immoderately, although we do not sing *Escamillo's* solos any more, now that the windows are open and the weather and the neighbors have grown so stuffy.) Being nothing if not æsthetic, Miss FARRAR also names *Java Head*. A third of her choices, Voltaire's letters, seems less characteristic.

Naturally Messrs. SPARGO and CHARLES EDWARD RUSSELL join in liking *In the Heart of a Fool*. As naturally, Mr. BURROUGHS selects an outdoor book, and has praise for an outdoor poet—but would you have suspected him of an interest in ANATOLE FRANCE? Mr. MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN, who since coming home from Denmark has commenced writing in a delightfully humorous vein, likes FRANCE's *The Amethyst Ring*, in spite of himself. It might astonish HENRY ADAMS that the one contributor to name his retrospective third personal soliloquy is an ever-so-popular novelist, GENE STRATTON PORTER. *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* is down, of course—under-scored by Mrs. WATTS, novelist; Mr. CASS GILBERT, architect, and NAZIMOVA. We sometimes wonder whether this most discussed book of the year would not have prospered as richly even without the remarkable advertising campaign which it enjoyed. Mr. MAURICE HEWLETT has the discernment to name a novel by our fortnightly own HUGH WALPOLE, wherein Miss FARRAR discerns with him. Mr. Justice HOLMES regrets that he is too busy for "excursions into other fields."

For our next list, like as not—albeit the notion is subject to change without notice—we shall cut up the city directory, draw names and addresses, and tell you what JOHN CASEY, teamster, of 987 West Forty-sixth street; QUEENIE LA TOUR, chorister, of *The Follies of the Garden*; IGNATZ SLIVOWICZ,

schnorrer, of nowhere in particular; ROBERT TAPE, broker, of Maiden lane; MURIEL SCHUYLKILL, debutante, of Central Park East and Lenox; MARIA SCLARPELLONI, garment operator, of Bleecker street; ALOYSIUS MEHEGAN, Traffic Cop, of the traffic squad; JOHN F. HILLAN, Mayor, of Brooklyn; and ONE-ROUND WASHINGTON, athlete, of San Juan Hill, have most enjoyed in the reading line during the last six months.

That will be the true microcosm, the Claude Lorraine glass held up to the literary taste of the Man in the Street!

WHAT HAS BECOME OF MIRTH?

WHERE is "Laughter holding both his sides"? Where are the brains, in America, that are rills of humor? Where is the mirth that is rollicking, gleeful, high with the animal spirits of careless youth?

Of "humorous" books there is no dearth. Our writers still "crack jokes," make puns and satirize the foibles and weaknesses of human nature, which we all admit we love no matter what the day's best grouch is. But the humor of our "humorous" books to-day is too self-conscious, too labored, too task-laden. So much of our "humor" is filled with "messages," "problems" and propaganda of all kinds, slyly inserted, camouflaged with a brassy haw-haw!

But the blithesome style is lacking. There is nothing mirth provoking written solely for the sake of the mirth. And the purest humor, which seems gone quite out of our natures, is that which sets up the Smile for the sake of the smile alone and the Grin just because a thing is funny.

We have read one book lately that was written because the man who wrote it did so merely for the pleasure of setting down the grotesque and feathery side of life in the New York streets. It is Mr. ROBERT CORTES HOLLIDAY's *Walking Stick Papers*. Mr. HOLLIDAY's humor is neither socialistic, Bolshevik, capitalistic, sinister, Aristophanical or unusual. It is just the record of a merry brain and a Pucklike eye.

There is too much effort to "keep up our spirits." The humor of the music halls and the humor of our books is machine made. The laughter that they evoke does not explode; it only crackles and fizzles.

The great American book, the great American author, is he who will revive in our souls Hilarity. The world is as young as it ever was; there are more contrasts to-day in our daily life than at any time in the history of the race. But where are the pens with the sportive heart behind them?

Perk up, America! Our career has just begun. We need the gleesome mirth of Rabelais without his dirt; the books that will "split our sides."

OF SHARKS.

HOW long is the largest shark on record? Admiral Sir CYPRIAN BRIDGE of the British Navy in his entertaining *Recollections* just published by Murray in London tells us of a "record shark" forty-eight feet long! "Once when we were cruising between Jamaica and Hayti," he says, "between noon and 1 P. M. we sighted an enormous shark. It came near enough to the ship to allow us to make a rough measurement of its length. Marking on the bulwarks a spot opposite the point of its head or nose and another spot opposite its tail, we measured the distance between them and found it forty-eight feet. I had never seen or heard of a shark of anything like this length."

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the largest of all known sharks is an inhabitant of the Indo-Pacific Ocean (*Rhinodon typicus*) called the chagrin. It exceeds fifty feet in length. A more formidable shark, however, belonging to the genus *Carcharodon* and living in all tropical seas, attains a length of forty feet, while fossil forms have been found ninety feet long.

The length of the well known thresher shark is given at fifteen feet, including the tail; but the present writer is confident that a thresher shark which he saw in combat with a whale off the coast of Brazil in 1914 was at least twenty-five feet in length. Threshers are also numerous off the coast of Peru; BRYCE, in his *South America* (Macmillan, 1912) speaks of seeing many whales beset by them there.

SONNET.

By Salomon de la Selva.

JUDGE me the thing I am: See how in me
My parts are such misfits that I can show
No harmony of self, but strangely grow
Dwarfish and gnarled like a fantastic tree:
Then, of my faults wisely considerate,
If still the wind about me sings for you
And I am sweet for shelter, prove this true,
That loveliness needs be nor tall nor straight
Nor formed to faultless music, but so wrought
As to make cheerful, come the evening,
An Autumn landscape or a too-grave thought:
A thing not of perfection, but designed
As refuge for a heaven-weary wing
Glad in an earthly rest to be confined.

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The Librarian's Corner

CONDUCTED BY

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LIBRARIES AND THE FARMS.

ONE of the subjects which the American Library Association will discuss when it meets in annual convention at Asbury Park next week is that of extending library privileges to rural communities. The suggestion has been made that the A. L. A., in pursuance of its purpose to function more definitely as an organization hereafter than it formerly did in peace times, undertake to promote some plan of programme for giving everybody, no matter where in the United States he may live, books to read when he wants them.

Farmers are much like town folks. They will use library books if it is made easy for them to get them. The first demonstration of this was made in Washington county, Maryland, where the Hagers-town public library began several years ago to send a wagon—since replaced by a motor car—loaded with books into every section of the county at regular intervals. For five years Washington county has boasted itself, probably truthfully, as the best read group of citizens in America.

In Van Wert county, Ohio, there is the only free public county library in America. It has branches in the smaller towns, with the main library at the county seat. But the people of Van Wert county don't read as much as the people of Washington county, for they have to go to their nearest branch library to get their books, and very few people are sufficiently conscious of a desire to read to take the trouble to go to a library.

Going to the library presupposes in most cases a desire for a particular book or a book on a particular subject, whereas the vast majority of readers, even those in whom the habit is a fixed one, select their books by chance. And even the desire for a particular book is seldom so acute as to justify in the possessor's mind a trip to town, or even a stop at the library when in town on other business.

By Parcel Post.

In Orange county, New York, another method of supplying books to farmers from a village public library has proved so successful that it is being made the basis for a demand for the revision downward of the parcel post rate on books—a revision, incidentally, that publishers and booksellers should welcome as eagerly as libraries. Taking a leaf out of the book of the A. L. A. overseas library service, which supplies books by military post direct from its Paris headquarters to any man in the A. E. F., A. L. Spencer, the librarian at Middletown, conceived the idea of a parcel post book service to farmers on the R. F. D. routes centring in his town.

Of course, the parcel post rate on books is prohibitive for any but the well to do, but a friend gave the library a small fund to make up the difference between a practical rate and the charge made by the post office, so that Mr. Spencer could offer to the farmers of Orange county all the books they wanted at a charge of one cent each way for the smaller books and two cents for large ones—a rate of postage still infinitely higher than that paid by the county weekly newspaper, which circulates free of postage in its home county.

Mr. Spencer found in a very short time that not only would farmers and their families read books if they could thus have them delivered at their gates but that their tastes in reading were very like those of people in town. They want their books in a hurry and they want to make their own selections. Mr. Spencer wisely refrained from urging his new patrons to read the sort of books that all the highbrows think all the lowbrows ought to read, but which no one ever caught a highbrow reading.

Books Back Promptly.

These farmers returned their books promptly within the time limit set; when fines accrued they were remitted with the books. In not a single case, Mr. Spencer reports, have books been lent from house to house to save the postage; American farmers are willing enough to pay for service. Indeed, one sometimes wonders whether the public library isn't handicapped in its usefulness because it is free. And as to the post office end of the experiment, the rural carriers were never overloaded; whatever the weather, the single book has never been too large for the standard rural mail box, and it seems apparent that whatever revenues the Government gets from this sort of circulation are all clear gain.

What it might mean in the way of making the American people even better informed than they are to-day, if book postage rates could be established that would compare, for instance, with those charged on periodicals, is obvious.